

Agroecology versus GMO Agribusiness: A System of Food Production for Human Need, Not Corporate Greed

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#),
[Environment](#), [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

There has been an adverse trend in the food and agriculture sector in recent times with the control of seeds and chemical inputs being consolidated through [various proposed mergers](#). If these mergers go through, it would mean that [three companies](#) would dominate the commercial agricultural seeds and chemicals sector. Over the past couple of decades, there has already been a restriction of choice with the [squeezing out of competitors](#), resulting in [higher costs](#) for farmers, who are increasingly reliant on [corporate seeds \(and their chemical inputs\)](#).

Big agribusiness players like Monsanto rely on [massive taxpayer](#) handouts to keep their business models on track; highly profitable models that have immense [social, health and environmental costs](#) to be paid for by the public. Across the globe [healthy, sustainable agriculture](#) has been uprooted and transformed to suit the profit margins of transnational agribusiness concerns. The major players in the global agribusiness sector fuel a [geo-politicised](#), globalised system of food production that result in numerous negative outcomes for both farmers and consumers alike (listed [here](#): 4th paragraph from the end).



Protest Movement, Vancouver

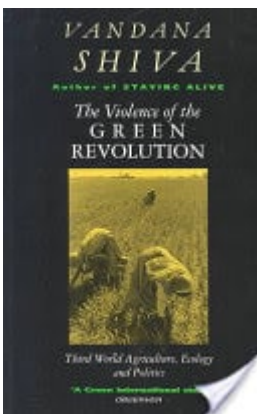
Aside from the domination of the market being a cause for concern, we should also be worried about a food system controlled by companies that have a history (see [this](#) and [this](#)) of releasing health-damaging, environmentally polluting products onto the market and engaging in activities that might be considered as constituting [crimes against humanity](#). If we continue to hand over the control of society's most important infrastructure - food and agriculture - to these wealthy private interests, what will the future look like?

There is no need to engage in idle speculation. Foods based on [CRISPR](#) (a gene-editing technology for which [Monsanto has just acquired](#) a non-exclusive global licensing agreement for use) and [synthetic biology](#) are already entering the market without regulation or proper health or environmental assessments. And we can expect many more [unregulated GM technologies](#) to influence the nature of our food and flood the commercial market.



Despite nice sounding rhetoric by company spokespersons about the humanitarian motives behind these endeavours, the bottom line is patents and profit. And despite nice sounding rhetoric about the precision of the techniques involved, these technologies pose [health and environmental risks](#). Moreover, CRIPRS technology could be used to create genes drives and terminator seed traits tools could be used for [unscrupulous](#) political and commercial ends.

There could well be severe social and economic consequences too. The impacts of synthetic biology (another sector dominated by a handful of private interests) on farmers in the Global South could result in a bio-economy of landlessness and hunger. Readers are urged to read [this report](#) which outlines the effects on farming, farmers and rural economies: synthetic biology has the potential to undermine livelihoods and would mean a shift to narrower range of export-oriented mono-cropping to produce biomass for synbio processes that place stress on water resources and food security in the exporting countries.



Aside from these social, health and environmental implications, can we trust private entities like Monsanto (or Bayer) to use these powerful (potentially bio-weapon) technologies responsibly? Given Monsanto's long history of cover-ups and duplicity, trust took the last train out a long time ago. Moreover, the legalities of existing frameworks appear to mean little to certain companies: see here what Vandana Shiva says about the [illegality of Monsanto's enterprise](#) in India. National laws that exist to protect the public interest are little more than mere hurdles to be got around by lobbyists, lawyers and political pressure. So what can be done?

Agroecology is a force for grass-root rural change that would be independent from the cartel of powerful biotech/agribusiness companies. This model of agriculture is already providing [real solutions](#) for sustainable, productive agriculture that prioritises the needs of farmers and consumers. It represents an alternative to corporate-controlled agriculture.

However, as much as people and communities strive to become independent from unscrupulous corporate concerns and as much as localised food systems try to extricate themselves from the impacts of [rigged global trade and markets](#), there also has to be a concerted effort to roll back corporate power and challenge what it is doing to our food. These corporations will not just go away because people eat organic or choose agroecology.

The extremely wealthy interests behind these corporations do their level best to displace or dismantle alternative models of production – whether agroecology, organic, public sector agriculture systems or anything that exists independently from them – and replace them with ones that serve their needs. Look no further than attempts to [undermine indigenous edible oils processing](#) in India, for instance. Look no further than the ‘[mustard seed crisis](#)’ in India in 1998. Or look no further than how transnational biotech helped fuel and then benefit from the destruction of [Ethiopia’s traditional agrarian economy](#).

Whether it’s on the back of US-backed coups ([Ukraine](#)), military conflicts ([Iraq](#)), ‘structural adjustment’ ([Africa](#)) or slanted trade deals ([India](#)), transnational agribusiness is driving a global agenda to suit its interests and eradicate impediments to profit.

To underline this point, let’s turn to what Michel Chossudovsky says in his 1997 book ‘The Globalization of Poverty’. He argues that economies are:

“opened up through the concurrent displacement of a pre-existing productive system. Small and medium-sized enterprises are pushed into bankruptcy or obliged to produce for a global distributor, state enterprises are privatised or closed down, independent agricultural producers are impoverished.” (p.16)

Increasing profit and shareholder dividends are the bottom line. And it doesn’t matter how much devastation ensues or how unsustainable their business model is, ‘crisis management’ and ‘innovation’ fuel the [corporate-controlled treadmill](#) they seek to impose.

As long as the domination of the food system by powerful private interests is regarded as legitimate and as long as their hijack of governments, trade bodies and trade deals, regulatory agencies and universities is deemed normal or is unchallenged in the sham ‘liberal democracies’ they operate within, we are destined for a future of more contaminated food, ill health, degraded environments and an agriculture displaced and uprooted for the benefit of self-interest.

The problems associated with the food system cannot be dealt with on a single-issue basis: it is not just about the labelling of GM foods; it’s not just about the impacts of Monsanto’s Roundup; it’s not just about Monsanto (or Bayer) as a company; and it’s not just about engaging in endless debates with corporate shells about the science of GMOs.

Despite the promise of the Green Revolution, [hundreds of millions](#) still go to bed hungry, food has become [denutritious](#), functioning rural economies have been [destroyed](#), diseases have [spiked](#) in correlation with the increase in use of pesticides and GMOs, soil has been [eroded or degraded](#), diets are [less diverse](#), global food security has been [undermined](#) and access to food is [determined by](#) manipulated international markets and speculation – not supply and demand.

Food and agriculture have become wedded to power structures that have created food surplus and food deficit areas and have restructured indigenous agriculture across the world and tied it to an international system of trade based on export-oriented mono-cropping, commodity production for a manipulated and volatile international market and indebtedness to international financial institutions.

The problem is the system of international capitalism that is driving a globalised system of [bad food and poor health](#), the [destruction](#) of healthy, sustainable agriculture and

systemic, half-baked attack on both [groups](#) and [individuals](#) who oppose these processes.

At the very least, there should be full public control over all GMO/synthetic biology production and research. And if we are serious about reining in the power of profiteering corporations over food – our most basic and essential infrastructure – they should be placed under democratic ownership and control.

In finishing, let us turn to Ghiselle Karim who at the end of her [insightful article](#) says:

... we demand that it is our basic human right to protect our food supply... [food] would be planned to meet human need, not corporate greed. We have hunger not because there is not enough food, but rather because it is not distributed equally. The core of the problem is not a shortage of food, but capitalism!

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